

TRUE BLUE

A WEEKLY DEVOTED TO THE STIRRING ADVENTURES OF OUR
BOYS IN BLUE

THE CRIME OF THE TRENCHES; OR, CLIF FARADAY'S LAST CARTRIDGE.

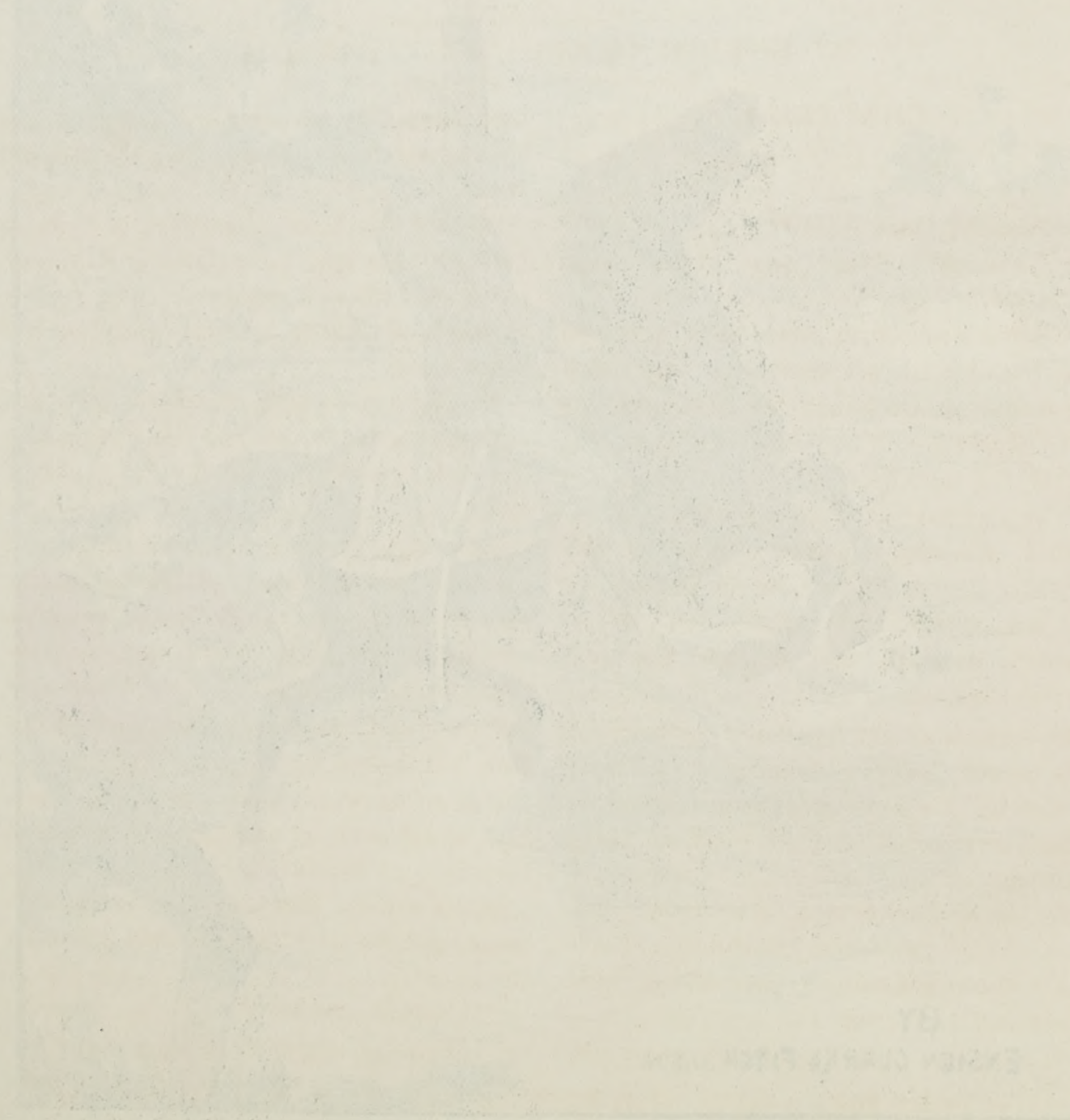


BY
ENSIGN CLARKE FITCH, U.S.N.

TRUE BLUE

THE ONLY BOOK IN THE WORLD
WHICH TELLS THE TRUTH ABOUT THE
DOGS IN BLUE

THE GUN OF THE FUTURE
OR
THE FARADAY'S LAST CARTRIDGE
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BY
FREDERICK CLARKE

TRUE BLUE.

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The Crime of the Trenches

OR,

CLIF FARADAY'S LAST CARTRIDGE.

BY ENSIGN CLARKE FITCH, U. S. N.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIDDEN HAND.

"Faraday, look out!"

"Heavens! Some one threw that knife——"

"Some one drove that knife through that board with all the force of which the human hand is capable—intended for your heart!"

"Who? why?"

"You answer that question!"

Clif Faraday, junior officer of the gunboat *Uncas*, did not try in words.

A tragedy, barely grazed, had left a riddle in its trail, and he was voiceless for the moment.

The naval officer had been seated on a rude bench leaning against a palisade erected by the Spaniards, now utilized by some American land troops as a camp boundary.

He and Lieutenant Raymond had come ashore from the gunboat on business. They had seated themselves here to rest and converse.

That sudden warning of the latter had

been caused by an ominous shiver of the thin broad fence board directly behind them.

With a shock, as the point of a knife pierced through, Lieutenant Raymond had given his companion a violent push forward, springing himself briskly out of harm's way.

In dismay and suspicion he now viewed a gleaming blade, set full to the hilt in the soft yielding timber like a driven spike.

The ugly menace of four inches of gleaming steel hinted at a fatal burrow for Clif Faraday's vitals, had he not been summarily forced from his original position, for the blade had come wielded with tremendous force just where his shoulders had rested.

For an instant, like his companion, Clif stood staring vaguely astonished at the thing of death.

Then with a fling he was up a wire brace, caught the top of the palisade, peered over.

"What do you see!"

"Nothing," reported Clif promptly—

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"too late! A quick blow, a quick man—fifty places of shelter and concealment within fifty paces."

Clif gave tents, brush and trench heaps a penetrating look, and dropped to the ground again.

There he stood, flecking the dust from his palms as coolly as if he had not grazed death by the tenth part of an inch.

Lieutenant Raymond was pulsating with no ordinary excitement.

"Well?" he uttered significantly.

Clif calmly shrugged his shoulders.

"Another war episode, that is all," he remarked with half a smile. "Shelved past, so——"

"Not so!" objected Raymond. "Do you comprehend, Faraday?"

"Perfectly."

"Some one has tried to assassinate you!"

"Possibly."

"And you coolly say——"

"Drop it! Man missed, man gone. Next time. I'll catch him!"

Clif Faraday's eyes gave a single meaningful snap.

"Next time?" almost shouted his companion exasperatedly. "Faraday, are your nerves made of steel?"

"Not at all, but a stray Mauser, a machete thrust, are to be expected everywhere and all of the time in the present critical state of affairs, so, dodge them and go on with business in hand is my motto."

"You are an astonishing young man! This is twice in three days that a mysterious hand has sought your life—yesterday a pistol shot from no one knows where, to-day—this!"

"Yes," admitted Clif imperturbably, "it seems evident that some one wants to kill me pretty badly."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"But you must suspect?"

"Come to think of it, yes. An enemy. I have only one in the world I can call to mind just now."

"One! Well, perhaps! You've buried several since you came into the service, though and that one?"

"David Parr."

The lieutenant of the Uncas gave a comprehending start.

"That's enlightening!" he said, gravely. "David Parr! The last one of the crowd who set up the scheme which you so neatly frustrated to steal the paymaster's yacht with two hundred thousand dollars aboard."

"You have it," affirmed Clif tranquilly. "There were three of them."

"Banded together as renegades and traitors, who had come to Cuba to pose as loyal Americans while making what they could out of the war."

"And known," continued Clif impressively, as 'Wolves of the Navy.' We ran them down and rescued the stolen gold, as you are aware. One of the trio fatally wounded, died the next day. The second, Richard Layton, is now our prisoner, awaiting his court-martial. The third——"

"David Parr."

"Is, I am satisfied, the wielder of that ugly-looking knife."

"He apparently seeks to put you out of the way from appearing as a witness against his imprisoned pal?"

"Not only that, but he is aware that I am determined to run down his schemes and spoil them. Remember, lieutenant, these fellows have kidnaped Reeves Harlow, a loyal marine. Layton acknowledges that he is alive and a prisoner."

"But won't tell where!"

"Says he can't. Parr alone knows. It seems that back of this Parr, the one active member of the crowd is the cousin

THERE WAS TROUBLE BEHIND THE SCENES.

of this missing Harlow, a villain who, in the event of his death, succeeds to his fortune, and who is also determined to force Harlow's fiancée to marry him."

"The young girl who came to the fleet last week with Harlow's discharge?"

"And whom I have placed at the inn at Guayla yonder till I hunt up her unfortunate lover and bring his enemies to book—exactly," nodded Clif, briskly, as if all he proposed and promised were the easiest thing of accomplishment in the world.

Lieutenant Raymond was familiar with the facts as stated. He moved uneasily and he looked anxious.

"Faraday," he said, "I very much fancy you are going to get into serious trouble interfering with all these outside matters."

"What's that!" flashed Clif electrically. "Outside matters?"

"Yes."

The naval officer's fine eyes quivered to their depths.

"Lieutenant," he said steadily, "I do not call the rescue of a kidnaped marine, the troubles of a loyal, plucky American girl who has come thousands of miles to save him, the hounding down of the mean-souled miscreants who would wreck her happiness—outside matters! These affairs have materialized as direct side issues to vital naval duty—I can't shirk them."

Clif Faraday spoke like the true, sympathetic fighter and friend of the distressed that he always was, and Lieutenant Raymond made a gesture of mingled admiration and deference.

"We are lying on our oars out yonder," continued Clif, indicating the magnificent American fleet blockading Santiago harbor at every point. "We've knocked out Cervera. The city is at our mercy. In a few weeks—days, hours, it

may be—there will be a capitulation, regular Spanish soldiers unpaid for seven long years, practically exiled on foreign soil, will be glad to throw up the sponge and get back to home and family, but this pestilential guerilla brood who have fattened on the misfortunes of others——"

"Including such traitors as Parr!"

"Precisely, must be rooted out! If fifty wars ended to-morrow, I will never leave Cuban soil till I have brought to book the last wolf of the navy, and restored to that poor, innocent, heart-broken girl over in Guayla yonder—Miss Edna Danvers—her missing lover!"

"You'll do it, Faraday—you'll make it!" declared the lieutenant; "you always do. It's a way you have with you! Provided——"

"Yes!" insinuated Clif.

"You don't get picked off by the bullet of that meanest skunk in creation—an assassin."

"That's the risk I take," pronounced Clif, philosophically. "The unfortunate thing is, I don't know this Parr."

"You never saw him?"

"Once only, but a mere fitting glance. He is probably hiding under the guise of refugee, volunteer, Cuban patriot, right here in the army."

"He was certainly in this camp a minute since," asserted the lieutenant, convincingly. "He drove that knife through that board."

"And I am going to look out for him, never fear!"

"He must know that you are pressing inquiries pretty closely as to his affairs?" suggested Lieutenant Raymond.

"I imagine that that is so. Yesterday I acquired a new point in this plot surrounding Miss Edna Danvers and the missing marine, Reeves Harlow."

"What?"

"I received a hint that the hidden hand

THERE WAS ONE WHO WAS NOT READY TO "GO ON."

—the main scoundrel who is back of these men, who has set going all this iniquitous scheming——”

“You mean the cousin of the marine, Harlow?”

“Yes, his name is Bruce. He is, I am assured, at Mana, a village twenty miles over the dividing line.”

“And that is why you sent Vic Rollins there?”

“That is one reason why Vic went to Mana, yes,” assented Clif. “You know, little Tom Warrington, the gunner’s helper, went with him? Our mascot got free, slipped us, flew ashore. It broke Warrington’s heart. He must hunt for it! Vic will help him in the casual search, reach Mana, and that’s why I was making for the telegraph tent.”

“Rollins promised to send you word?”

“He agreed to wire me to come on if he got the remotest hint of this Bruce being in Cuba.”

“They won’t recapture the mascot,” spoke Lieutenant Raymond.

“Hardly. Old Terror will keep his liberty, now he’s got it,” acquiesced Clif.

“By the way, lieutenant,” the naval officer went on abruptly, “I’ll meet you at the telegraph tent in an hour.”

“Very good,” bowed Raymond.

Clif was evidently inspired with a newly suggested idea, for he started rapidly over in the direction of Guayla.

It was here that he had placed in the matronly care of the innkeeper’s wife the young lady to whom the recent conversation had alluded.

Clif had not seen Miss Edna Danvers for two days. The appearance on the scene of Parr, the discovery concerning the possible presence in Cuba of her persecutor—her lover’s cousin, Bruce—impelled the naval cadet to consider now, however, that he had better warn her to look out for these two villains.

Clif felt that he had his hands full with the case in grasp, but he was confident he could outmanœuvre his enemies in the end.

He knew the motives and hopes of the schemers—to wrest Harlow’s fortune from his possession, to intimidate the beautiful Edna Danvers to wed the scoundrel she despised, to kill him—Faraday—off as a dangerous witness against their imprisoned accomplice, as the person they most feared would interfere with their designs.

He was a little worried at not receiving some report from his chum, confidant and fellow cadet, Vic Rollins.

It was now twenty-four hours since Vic had left with little Tom Warrington for Mana, and Vic on an average of his usual brisk way of doing things, should have got some hint to Clif hours since.

The telegraph line was open between Mana and Guayla, and Clif intended to wire some inquiries, if word did not soon materialize.

“That elusive Mascot may have tempted Vic to linger by the wayside,” reflected Clif.

Every vessel in the navy had its Mascot—that of the Uncas was a royally dignified and immense eagle.

It was black as a raven, with one marked peculiarity—a white crown that distinguished it in a conspicuous way.

Every superstitious marine aboard voted the luck of the Uncas gone forever if the cherished bird was not recovered, so Vic might have lost some time in hunting for it, or posting inquiries, Clif reasoned.

Rare, royal luck indeed that of the Uncas had been since it had joined Sampson’s invincible fleet!

At least, if action, opportunity for heroic exploit, the heat and centre of every conflict that had engaged the squadron since its arrival off Santiago were any

FRANK DEALS CROOKEDLY WITH NO ONE.

criterion, Clif Faraday had little to complain of.

Himself the object of the admiral's especial approbation in numerous scouts for the navy, Clif had seen some remarkably brisk service, had indulged in some marvellously during adventures.

For the present, it seemed as if fate had particularly placed in his hands the rescue of a fellow marine, the capture of his persecutors, the welfare and happiness of a beautiful, innocent American girl, who but for his kindly offices would have found herself stranded and homeless in a peril-infested country.

"I have news for Miss Edna Danvers that will give her hope," soliloquized Clif as he hurried into the town and towards its one large inn. "If Vic finds out anything about Bruce, if I can get a single clue as to this murderous Parr, I shall soon have her lover back by her side, and that will be satisfaction all around."

Planning and confident, the junior officer of the Uncas entered the inn at Guayla.

A knock, an inquiry, and Clif Faraday faced a new and unexpected complication in the case to which he had pledged his honor and his service.

CHAPTER II.

THE BROKEN WIRE.

"Gone!"

The word fell breathlessly from Clif Faraday's lips as the landlady of the inn answered his inquiry concerning Miss Edna Danvers.

"Since before daylight, senor. You are agitated, the note——"

"What note?" demanded Clif with a start.

"Your note, that you sent requesting her presence——"

"You have such?"

"I found it in the senorita's room."

"Let me have a look at it. As I feared—those villains have got ahead of me! Both in their power now—decoyed, kidnaped!"

The naval officer barely listened to the landlady's slow nasal drawling tones.

Then the minute he perused the forged note addressed to Miss Edna Danvers, bearing his own name in signature, Clif read the shallow pretext that had lured the girl he had sought to protect into the hands of her enemies.

The brief missive had bidden her hasten to the plaza to meet the friend who had avowedly made some new and important discoveries.

Quick reasoner that he was, Clif soon comprehended the change in the situation and the motives behind it.

"A plain proposition!" he muttered, hurrying from the inn and biting his lips for sheer vexation. "I warned Miss Danvers not to stir from the place, but I had not thought of providing for this cheap ruse. Since daylight—nearly twelve hours! The villains have got a big start of me."

Clif was nettled, chagrined, baffled.

The enemy now had the game entirely in their own hands.

It was true that one of the despicable "wolves of the navy" was dead, a second in jail, but that would cut little figure in the further purposes of their free comrades.

Clif estimated that the main actor in the plot—Bruce—must be at Mana or in its vicinity, as he had received a hint. It must be he as well who, through hired mercenaries, had accomplished the abduction of the fair American girl. His principal accomplice, Parr, directly on the spot, had probably set the snare that had decoyed her, and Edna Danvers was undoubtedly now being borne to share

WE WANT EVERY READER TO HAVE A PRIZE—See Page 32.

her lover's captivity till Bruce's wishes were complied with.

Parr had ventured to linger behind, and Clif surmised why.

Practically unknown, up to all the dodges for taking advantage of his knowledge of army ways and the present mixed up condition of affairs, Parr had aimed to remove Clif as a dangerous witness against his imprisoned accomplice—that was as much as he could do for his foredoomed fellow traitor in confinement.

The assassination of Clif, the sole champion of the distressed American girl, would, the schemers possibly calculated, destroy all risk of pursuit, of further outside meddling in Bruce's determination to secure the fortune of another and an unwilling bride.

Clif's first impulse was to hasten to military friends, who would at his word start a thorough search for Miss Edna Danvers and her abductors.

Then it occurred to him that these had probably long since left Guayla far behind them.

If Spanish, as they probably were, they had made the trail difficult to follow by cutting through the lines of their friends, his enemies.

It was further reasonable to suppose that they had made for Mana, if Bruce was at that place.

Clif felt that he had his clue, and proceeded to act upon it. He turned his face in the direction of the telegraph tent where he had agreed to meet Lieutenant Raymond.

It was his first visit there of the day, and he noticed unusual commotion and sombre, anxious faces in its vicinity.

Lieutenant Raymond came forward to meet his fellow officer, his features showing that he had something of importance to tell.

"No messages from the west," he said, at once.

"Why not?" questioned Clif quickly.

"The wires are down."

"Cut?"

"They think not. From observation, the operator is inclined to believe that a pole went down in the blow, early this morning. At all events, the wires have been dead since then."

"Have they located the break?"

"They think so."

"Why don't they remedy it, then?"

"Ah! that is the dilemma," explained the lieutenant. "You see, where the line curves and where the break possibly exists, lies directly between that troublesome camp of dons over yonder, and our own. Our sharpshooters have kept them from interfering with it all along. Now they are retaliating."

"How?"

"They have picked off seven men, sent to repair the line since morning. Three came back desperately wounded. They report a whole swarm of the fellows in the old trenches."

"And beyond that?"

"You can guess. Four slipped past into the cut. They have not come back!"

Clif Faraday silently took in the lieutenant's explanation, thoughtfully surveyed the landscape concerned.

He drew nearer to the telegraph tent as a colonel came hurriedly up to the spot and entered, and interested as well as curious, both Clif and the lieutenant followed.

An anxious consultation was soon going on between half-a-dozen officers.

Clif felt himself doubly concerned in the matter, and listened intently to all that was said.

It seemed that stations down the line had kept up communication with the

MONEY WAS NEEDED FOR CASSIE.

main camp by means of the telegraph for over a week.

Through this medium movements had been communicated from headquarters, and the break in the wire was a seriously complicating matter.

The operator was positive as to the location of the break—from a high spot near by it could be observed that the pole at the head of the gap was down.

"This occurs at a particularly critical time, 'the colonel was saying, annoyed-ly,' for it is necessary to call two detachments from the interior to the front to guard some weak points about Santiago."

The operator recounted the efforts of the day to mend the break.

Four men had got past the enemy's main entrenchment, but——

That was hours ago. The line had not been repaired!

"A sharpshooter's bullet—poor fellows!" sighed the officer. "I see no way but to dislodge the main force of the Spaniards and take entire possession of the gap."

"Easier said than done, that, colonel!" remarked a fellow officer.

"Why so?"

"No spot could be more difficult to hold, after getting it. Those dons would simply have our camp at their mercy, shut up down in that hollow."

The colonel's brow grew troubled. He paced up and down, gnawing his mustache nervously.

"It must be done some way. We must get word to and from the outside camps!" he kept saying over and over.

Clif Faraday now understood decisively that he could neither get word from Vic Rollins nor send.

The situation involved one of those dilemmas that puzzle the officer and call upon the soldier for extraordinary sacrifice.

Clif did not know the colonel personally, but he was acquainted—more, was quite friendly—with his principal adviser, the major.

Clif reflected for a moment. Then he edged his way up to the side of this latter, who was seated on the end of a table.

"Major," he said in a low tone, "you will excuse me for my boldness, but I have something to suggest."

The major's face was troubled, but it brightened up as he recognized his cadet friend, and he extended a hand.

"That's good Faraday!" he smiled and nodded. "Something bright and quite the right thing may always be expected of you!"

"Oh, I don't know that," demurred Clif, modestly.

"We do!" proclaimed the major, with emphasis. "Out with it. Colonel!" he spoke aloud, "a friend has a suggestion to make along the line of our present embarrassment."

"Who is it?" shortly demanded the colonel, not in a mood for idle talk.

"The naval officer who made the first dash around the bay in Santiago."

"Ah!" exclaimed the colonel, "that must be——"

"Faraday!"

The colonel looked more indulgent, and indicated by his pose that he was ready to listen.

"I was going to say," began Clif, "that I have business at Mana. It is along the line of the outside detachments. If you have any messages to send——"

"That is all very well," interrupted the colonel, "but constant communication with the forces, with the fate of Santiago trembling in the balance, is absolutely necessary. No!" he ejaculated, straightening up like a man confronted with an imperative necessity and bound to face it

A Sharp Voice Told Sargent That He Was Talking Through His Hat.

squarely; "there is only one way to perfect and preserve our tactical positions—the telegraph. Some way, somehow, that broken wire must be mended!"

"Very well, colonel," bowed Clif, calmly, as if he proposed a walk along the beach. "If there is no other way, I will mend your broken wire."

"Faraday!" began Lieutenant Raymond in a tone almost of entreaty.

"What's that!" cried the major, incredulously.

The operator looked startled—the colonel stared. The necessity of the hour was met, yet he wavered.

"Yes," pursued Clif, evenly, "I think I understand the situation. It is the pole at the end of the gap?"

The operator nodded.

"What is necessary?"

"Simply to find the broken ends."

"And twist them together?"

"Yes."

"That is easy."

The major gave a gasp.

"Colonel," he said, quite unsteadily, "I cannot advise this continued risk of the lives of our best and bravest men!"

The colonel did not speak. He was responsible for his command. Headquarters demanded a through wire down the line of camps—his to see that the same was kept intact, no matter how.

"If you will engage the Spaniards in the old trenches," continued Clif, rapidly, for he had thought it all out, "give me a picked dozen to slip past their guns into the gap under cover of the attack——"

"Agreed!" cried the colonel, waking up magically.

"Then consider the thing done," spoke Clif, with thorough confidence.

The colonel stepped out of the tent. Lieutenant Raymond regarded his friend anxiously.

"Faraday," he said in a low, impressive tone, "do you know what you have undertaken?"

"Yes," responded Clif, simply.

"The gap reached, you intend——"

"To leave the men on guard at its entrance while I creep down its length and reach the wires."

"Those four others failed——"

"If I make five, it is in the line of duty," said Clif, doughtily.

He could hear the colonel giving rapid orders outside.

Quite a commotion followed. The major passed out. Clif more minutely questioned the operator as to what was to be done and how.

He was a little surprised when he passed out of the tent with the lieutenant.

A movement at a distance showed that two companies were forming to carry out the first section of the plan suggested.

Twenty men stood grouped about the major.

"Volunteers," Clif heard that officer say, "you are free to make your choice."

"Well, we've made it, major, hain't we?" drawled a big, raw-boned giant, hitching up his belt, and evidently "spoiling for a fight."

"Who's to lead us?" propounded the foremost of a quartette in rough riders' costume.

The major turned and pointed to Clif.

At that moment one of the four recognized the naval officer—they had engaged in a mutual dash for life three weeks before under the walls of Morro.

"Whoop!" he yelled, with dancing eyes and cracking heels. "It's all right, boys! I know him—who don't? Who leads us? Who's going to give us a run for our money and tie those two wires together? Why, who would it be but—Faraday of the Uncas!"

CHAPTER III.

ON THE DOUBLE-QUICK.

A vivid stare went the rounds of that little company.

Clif Faraday felt his pulses stir as he faced the battery of quick-leaping eyes instantly fixed upon him at the rough rider's enthusiastic announcement.

The naval officer had no extraordinary idea of his own greatness, but he had done some clever things in the line of duty, and it warmed his heart to see that these hardy heroes recognize and appreciate.

A cheer!

They broke loose unrestrainedly. There was a mixed, rapid babble of remembering hints as to this and that past exploit on the part of Clif, and the welkin rang.

"He'll do!"

"We'll stick together, partner!"

"Put it there, comrade!"

The rough rider's great paw enclosed Clif's hand, and the compact was sealed.

The major was explaining the programme of advance. A subaltern came leading up a spirited horse.

"Into the saddle, Faraday!" outlined the major, briskly. "The two companies will make the break for the main body of the dons. Keep close, volunteers! Turn for the gap the minute you get the word. Leave the rest to Faraday."

Clif experienced a vivid sensation of excitement and valor.

Over in the camps some colored troops were singing a lullaby—from the water some naval band rang out the stirring strains of the "Star Spangled Banner."

There was all absence of grim preparation—a mere side sortie, everything was done briskly, on the impulse, with a mighty hurrah.

Clif glanced at the mixed contingent

that grouped about him, centred from all points of the camp at the urgency call for volunteers.

Four rough riders, one sable-face hero grim and prim as an ebony statue; two "wildcats" from the "fighting Fifth," eager, anxious-faced men, short and tall, down to two fellows at the end of the line—thus the coterie ran.

Upon these latter Clif fixed his attention with a quick, keen glance.

One of them was a mere beardless stripling—a boy "with eyes like mother's," pure and clear as crystal now as they scintillated with the quivering grandeur of a resolve heroic.

"Not him, major!" whispered Clif—"he's mettle, grit to the core, but——"

"Too young? Marston, step out!"

"Major!" gasped the young fellow, pleadingly, his face falling, untold eloquence in the simple fervent appeal.

"Let him go!" muttered the major to Clif. "It will be the making of him."

"And if it is the unmaking?"

The major shrugged his shoulders.

"Chances of war!"

"I would feel it on my conscience forever. A trifle closer, major; let me ask you—who is that man?"

Clif directed the major's attention to the person standing next to the boy.

Both had kept to the rear. The boy soldier's timidity Clif readily traced—a fear that he might be rejected—but that of the tall, furtive-faced man by his side seemed to conceal some sinister purpose.

He shifted his glance as Clif ran him over with a keen eye.

"I don't know who he is," murmured the major, slowly. "One of the new volunteers, drifted from the interior, I imagine."

"Major, I don't like that man——" began Clif.

A LIBERAL OFFER —SEE LAST PAGE.

"Then you'll drop him, too eh? It's—go!"

"Forward—march!"

The words shot through the air from the direction of the attacking companies just then.

In an instant Clif and his escort were in the midst of an active rush.

The major evidently had no opportunity to carry out his intention of dropping the two objectionable numbers of the forlorn hope contingent.

At least, as Clif rode forward to overtake the moving companies ahead, and then lessened the gait to accommodate himself to their progress, he found that his suggestion in regard to the boy volunteer and the man whose face and mien had impressed him so unfavorably had not been acted on.

It was too late to undertake any discussion of their disposal now, however, for the sortie was on in full dash almost at once.

"On the double-quick!"

The attack on the main intrenchment of the Spaniards was designed to partake of the nature of a surprise.

In a cyclone whirl the soldiers bore forward toward the natural breastwork of rocks that shielded their enemies.

Clif watched their movements keenly, driving ahead as if a part of them.

He had no occasion to complain of the ardor and courage of his escort—they grouped about and after him grandly sublime in their unwavering dispatch.

Even the stripling and the furtive-faced fellow seemed infused with the enthusiasm of the moment.

The former, with parted lip, ran forward rifle in hand, his face flushed with eagerness, his eyes fixed on Clif to catch the indication that must soon direct the desperate detachment from the main body, the desperate run for the gap.

Clif gave the youth an encouraging smile, and the eyes of the mettled boy flashed back a proud, resolute undying fidelity and vigilance.

The sinister-faced man was no coward, either, Clif decided—he was the foremost of the followers of the naval officer.

Now on one side, now on the other of the little coterie, he seemed determined to be first in the breach and in at the death at all hazards, and Clif mentally modified his former mean opinion of him.

A great volley swept from the forward ranks of the American soldiers.

It was responded to from the entrenchment. Then hot and furious ran a deafening fusilade.

Smoke and confusion surrounded the volunteer detachment.

Clif felt his companions press close to his side—so much so that his horse shied and became partly unmanageable.

It was an excellent opportunity for the intended break from the main body.

The dash across the exposed space to the mouth of the cut would now be shielded by the hovering smoke.

The Spaniards, engrossed in repelling the main assault, would have no time to play in the deadly fire of leisure on the forlorn hope.

Clif only waited for the smoke to clear slightly to order the movement meditated.

A shallow trench ran in the direction of the gap.

It was the critical moment, and Clif Faraday knew it—the action of a timely second involved the lives of his brave followers.

He raised his sword waveringly and turned to give the word of command.

It was to almost run his elbow into the very face of the furtive-eyed volunteer, suspiciously hovering at the side of the horse.

Clif saw that he had a knife in his

WHO LOOKED THROUGH THE PEEP-HOLE IN THE CURTAIN?

hand, and he saw, too, with some surprise that the boy volunteer seemed to be pulling at him with white face and startled eyes.

The main issue was too intense, however, to be obscured by trivial side episodes.

"Forward!" spoke Clif definitely.

"Forward!" ran the echo behind him among the throng half enveloped with dust and smoke.

"Captain Faraday!" broke in a sudden fervent gasp from the lips of the boy volunteer.

It was drowned in a hissing oath from those of the man whose knife-armed hand he had attempted to seize.

In a flash Clif Faraday saw that this suspicious by-play boded something important.

Then his worst fears of the man he had sought to reject were confirmed.

The latter evaded the extended hand of the boy volunteer.

In fact Clif was pretty sure that he delivered a vicious elbow nudge that took the young fellow half off his footing.

Darting a venomous look at Clif, the man swept his knife straight towards the curveting steed.

Into its flank he subtly buried its point.

The pain-maddened animal shot up and away like a swift arrow sent from a taut bowstring.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GATEWAY OF DEATH.

It would be impossible for a person of Clif Faraday's quick mental activities not to trace in the sinister episode of the knife lunge enmity, double dealing, treachery.

The boy volunteer was his friend—the fellow he had mistrusted was his foe.

Why, a flashing moment of thought

was not sufficient to develop, but here were the facts!

A cry of surprise and dismay rent the air behind the flying cadet.

It formed a startled chorus of excited expressions from his followers, who could not account for his abrupt desertion.

Evidently they had not noted the knife thrust at the horse's flanks, for the assailant's movements had been deft, rapid, his back towards them, the hovering smoke of battle enveloped and the rattling hail of musketry distracted.

Clif's temper rose with a shock, his eyes flashed.

Time must be taken to punish the miscreant who was complicating the situation at a vital juncture.

"Whoa!"

As well speak to the wind! Clif Faraday grasped the bridle—to have it come free in his hands.

He almost fell backwards—the bridle had been cut at the bits.

He rose in the stirrups—he was leaving his men far behind. This must not be.

"What is this?"

Clif's hair seemed to raise.

A monstrous, a paralyzing fact was added immediately to the surprises grouped so rapidly, materializing inside of fifteen seconds.

In some subtle way his stirrured feet had been encased with wire and were imprisoned.

Clif could neither halt the madly rushing horse nor leap from its saddle.

"A plot, a purpose, and that man did it! Why?" fairly shouted Clif.

"And who is he?" followed sharply from the lips of the electrified cadet.

A traitor, of course, and as the scheme of the moment had been directed solely against Clif, of course, as well, a personal enemy and a deadly one.

FRANK MERRIWELL IS AN ACTOR NOW.

Clif had but a moment in which to act if he would save the day.

With lightning-like speed he leaned far over on one side, essaying to reach the wired contrivance that looped one foot.

Down the shallow trench the affrighted horse continued to plunge.

Suddenly it shied—a bushy reach had turned its course.

"An ambush!" gasped Clif.

He caught sight of half a dozen sheltered Spaniards as a volley belched forth.

A shrill neigh told that the horse had received the charge full in its breast.

Clif experienced a stinging lash of fiery pain along one hand.

The animal ran on, staggered, half-paused, trembled in every limb, made another noble dash, and plunging forward fell heavily to the ground.

A rock rose up, so that steed and rider were sheltered from the ambush.

Towards the party held spellbound by Clif's abrupt desertion, the bullets were now directed, driving them back.

Clif tugged at one stirrup hinderance and got his foot free.

Upon the other limb the horse's weight half rested. With a wrench Clif liberated foot and stirrup.

Momentarily expecting a foe from the ambush stealing forward to dispatch him, Clif struggled and finally detached the last entangling wires.

Evidently the Spaniards supposed he had sunk wounded or dead with the horse, and needed no immediate attention at present.

Clif, not venturing to arise, took a survey of the situation.

He could not return to his volunteer detachment, nor hope to hail them at that distance intelligently.

Besides this, they seemed to have retreated, and as the smoke lifted were

merged into and swallowed up by the main attacking party.

In the other direction, Clif noted with satisfaction, was personal security, at least temporary shelter.

Not ten paces distant was the gap opening.

This had been the objective point of the exploit.

Clif essayed a rapid glide, head down, shoulders crouched.

He was unseen, at least unchallenged, by the ambushed party.

"I have made the point started for!" he murmured breathlessly. "Nobody to guard the rear? Well, my aim is straight ahead."

Clif tried to believe that his late followers, seeing the way blocked, himself and horse gone down and presumably extinguished, would abandon all thoughts of following him.

Just one burning, throbbing mystery dragged his mind perforce back to the group from which he had been so suddenly and tragically separated.

It was perfectly clear to Clif that the man with the knife had calculated on driving him to his death.

Either he knew of the ambush which the naval officer had so narrowly evaded, or he counted on that dash across the open, brief as it was, focussing attention from the entrenchments.

"He thinks me done for," ruminated Clif. "When I get back——"

The junior officer of the Uncas paused there, but flashing eye and firm set lips told two things forcibly: he would have it out with this mysteriously audacious foe, he had not the slightest lack of confidence but that he would manage to get back to the camp eventually.

"Ahead!" murmured Clif. "I have come to repair the broken wire—now to set about it."

ONE OF THE ACTORS REFUSES TO PLAY.

That was the object of the present enterprise. Clif looked warily down the cut.

Its sides rose very nearly sheer perpendicularly, and those tree-crowned heights might conceal a whole covey of Spanish sharpshooters.

Just beyond him the opening broadened that must in the past few hours have been a gateway of death to four devoted martial souls.

At least, one by one, a dauntless quartette had penetrated that shadowy gap since sunrise, and none had returned—none could have reached the broken wire.

Clif glanced down the cut. A bare three-quarters of a mile intervened from end to end.

Rocks and verdure spread everywhere—an admirable shelter on the dead level—but if a foe was lurking above, a refugee here would be like a rat in a trap.

Clif counted all the chances, prepared best he could for the risks he was likely to encounter.

He threw himself flat on the ground and struck out a course where a ridge of dense bushes protected.

Twenty feet accomplished he halted, and lifting his head ventured to scan the prospect forward, now more clearly in view.

Forty feet covered, Clif Faraday, putting out a crawling hand, drew it back with a creeping shudder.

"One!"

Prone at his side, almost touched by the exploring cadet, lay a human form, stark and still.

Clif overcame his horror as best he could—a gaping hole in the man's forehead told of the sinister bullet that had cut the cord of life.

It was a tragical reminder of what he might expect, but Clif put on grimly.

"Two!"

Down in a burrow, where it had evidently fallen, a huddled form caught Clif's sweeping range of vision after a further careful progress of twenty yards.

Just beyond this point of discovery Clif came to a rather serious halt.

The bushes ended. He had not covered one-third of the distance to the terminus of the cut, and except for the shelter of the rocks there was no chance of pursuing a covert progress.

He could not fail to guess from what source the bullets had come overhead.

A deadly Mauser rifle in the hands of some unerring sharpshooter had picked off these men—their companions likely, too, further along, or back the course at spots that had not come in scope of Clif's limited observation.

It was now either retreat or advance—Clif never turned back, once started on an enterprise.

He continued to crawl with caution and slowness.

Clink!

A bullet nearly pinned him. Whence? Above, of course, but from which side of the gap, from what portion?

No enlightening curl of vapor indicated—the smokeless Mauser made dead men, but "told no tales!"

Clif signaled his narrow escape by a dive for a rock—the shot had come from behind him, he could estimate that.

He crouched, reflecting. If the sharpshooter was stationary, he was safely sheltered for the time being.

If it were possible, however, for him to move from his position and line the course of the cut overhead, it would only be a few moments before Clif would play the target anew.

The naval officer meditated rapidly. Then he placed his cap on the end of his sword and obtruded it beyond the edge of his shelter.

The shallow trick, sure enough, drew the fire of an eager enemy.

"Good!" ejaculated Clif, as a bullet pierced the cap and he located the source of firing from the echo of the report. "That came from the east side of the cut. Now I know what to do."

Clif promptly made a run for the extreme eastern edge of the gap.

Unless the enemy had a crooked gun as well as a smokeless one, by closely hugging the side Clif well knew he could evade being shot.

Twice he was fired at within the next five minutes, but he went on unscathed.

Clif reached and passed through the narrowing natural gateway that let out of the cut.

The fallen telegraph pole lay within ready view and reach.

He had been provided by the operator with a small coil of wire and a pair of nippers.

Just what had been surmised as to the condition of affairs Clif found to be true—the storm of the early morning had blown down the pole and snapped the wire.

He picked up the broken ends, uncurled them, applied the metal splice—made all safe and sound.

Clif could not repress a certain thrill of satisfaction and pride, as he realized that once more the enlightening electrical current was in active force, the dangerous mission of the hour ably and accurately executed.

It was only a momentary glow, however.

Turning back towards the gap, it seemed like a transition to all that was sombre and tragic.

"Why venture it?" reflected Clif. "I can put ahead and make Mana safely. The repair in the wire will be instantly comprehended at the camp, only—that fellow who started me into this nest of perils—hark!"

Clif chilled.

A fearful scream, full of pain and poignant expression, filled the long echoes of the gap.

Then all was still.

THE CRIME OF THE TRENCHES.

"What was that!"

In forcible wonder Clif Faraday pounded the inquiry.

He was not given to vacant staring and guesswork, however, and promptly he put back for the mouth of the cut.

The mellowing shadows of dusk had begun to haunt the spot.

Clif strained his prolonged glance for a first look had revealed not a trace of occupancy the entire length of the gap.

Suddenly a sharp report made the echoes again vibrate.

Clif instantly knew its source from the peculiar sound—there could be but one—the Spanish sharpshooter posted up aloft.

Who was he firing at—a victim who had shouted ere he was hit?

"Ah! there is some one."

Clif detected the swift, startled flitting of a human form.

So rapid was its spring in among a nest of verdure covering the side of the cut like a thick carpet, that it was blurred, undistinguishable, as to any familiar characteristics.

The man—for a man it was—had found both covert and safety, for he had begun to scale the eastern side of the gap, and was therefore out of range now of the sharpshooter.

Clif could see the foliage rustle under which he was burrowing.

Up, up, the movement followed—then the deft and audacious climber must have struck an intersecting crevice, for the stir and motion abruptly ceased.

Clif advanced a few steps, highly keyed up, yet dubious and speculative.

"It can't be that some one of the volunteers followed me?" he murmured.

"My name!"

Clif came to an abrupt halt with a shock.

"Faraday!"

Faint but distinct Clif heard the word—a quavering, agitated call, weak, yet intense and distressful.

Clif glanced awesomely all about him.

"Speak—again!" he ventured.

"Here! do you not see me?"

"Mercy!"

In the embrace of an irregularity in the rocky surface lay a prostrate form.

Its white, plaintive face looked up at Clif—the naval officer experienced a marvellous thrill as he recognized the speaker.

It was the boy volunteer of the forlorn hope.

"You!" breathed Clif, "and——"

"Dying."

"What is that!"

Clif dropped to the side of the prostrate soldier boy.

He peered keenly only once to agree mentally to the brief, significant announcement.

A wound near the heart, a second—gaping, jagged—in the throat—the glazing eyes, the fluttering lips, the hopelessly groping hand, told Clif the worst instantly.

One of those hands, reaching for his own, touched it—the contact was tremulous, clammy.

"My poor fellow!" spoke Clif, rousing with an ardent soul of infinite pity.

A twitch of pain crossed the colorless lips. Then they broke to a faint smile.

"I—I never flinched!" came the words, proudly, defiantly uttered. Even in the shadow of terrible suffering and death.

"Flinched!" repeated Clif. "You are a hero! but——"

"I tried to save you!"

"From——"

"That man."

"You mean——"

"The traitor, the scoundrel, the assassin who cut your horse's bridle, and——"

"I understand!"

"They told me I would faint at the first bullet—did I?"

"Never!"

"They said I would turn and run at the sight of blood—did I?"

Clif answered with a negative nod, choking up at the pitiful category.

"And I saved Faraday of the Uncas—that's glory enough, isn't it?"

Faraday of the Uncas fairly swayed under an excess of emotion he could not control.

The frank hero-worshiper winced with the pain that was fast crushing sense and being, but he made no outcry.

"That traitor disappeared," went on the soldier boy weakly. "I followed. I couldn't find him."

"You came into this valley of death!" began Clif.

"Yes—after him, to warn you, if he was after you. He was—he is! Where is he now? He sprang upon me just here—his knife did this, and this, and—good-bye, Faraday—Faraday of the Uncas! I never flinched!"

With the hero's name on his hero lips, the soldier boy sunk back—dead.

Clif Faraday lingered by his side, tamed, fixed.

That brief, rapid colloquy had been tragic, intense, heroic.

This bright, mettled young being—"with eyes like mother's!"—had repudiated grandly the scoffs of those who little dreamed of the great soul enclosed in the sensitive, boyish form.

It was awesome to see death come thus, so sudden, so unexpected—and then like a bitter sting the thought that here the murderous blade of the assassin had wrought its havoc, spurred Clif up like a nettle.

"That man!" he cried, and started towards the spot where he had seen the figure vanish a moment or two before.

Clif's brain seemed on fire. Treachery at all times goaded him like a lash, but now added, the innocent blood of the valiant soldier boy seemed calling out for vengeance.

Where was the villain, this setter of traps, this luring assassin!

Grazed by the sharpshooter's bullet, the miscreant had taken to cover—but Clif knew where.

He would penetrate his covert instantly, and make it the urgent business of the moment, now!

All other issues must wait till he had ferreted out this inhuman butcher, and had dragged him face to face with the traitor's noose.

Clif ran his eye along the thickly verdured face of the rocks, making out finally where, pressed aside, they showed the traces of just having been disturbed.

The man had crept up somewhere under that umbrageous veil of green.

"Don't try it!"

OLD DAN DRINKS AGAIN.

Clif straightened erect with a jerk.

"Not a move, not a quiver, or, Faraday, your charmed life has met its Waterloo at last!"

"Wait!" rang out Clif's voice.

Twenty feet up, not one hand, but a pair of hands had stretched out from beyond the vines—each held a revolver.

A face half revealed—that of the treacherous volunteer—peered down.

Clif read the menace, saw his predicament, knew he was doomed if his hand stole so much as an inch towards his belt.

The impulse was haunting his lips, however, to propound one pertinent query: What was the motive of this man's enmity?

Before he could frame a word, the cowardly assassin began his deadly work.

Crack! crack! crack! the revolver shots rang out, one crowding the first echo of the other.

A button was clipped, a second shot struck Clif's shoulder on a glint—the naval cadet staggered back.

Crack!

Sharper came a louder report—Clif had backed into range of that other enemy, the sharpshooter.

"Ha!" exulted the fellow with the pistols.

Clif threw up both hands. One whirl he took.

Then he sank flat, prostrate, across a rock, perfectly rigid.

"Ended!" fell a single gloating requiem on the still sunset air.

CHAPTER VI.

JUST GRAZED.

The junior officer of the Uncas lay motionless as the mute form of the soldier boy ten feet away, but Clif was not dead—he was not even wounded.

When that double fire opened up on him, he knew he was doomed if he stood his ground or put up a fight.

What the rattling revolvers of the treacherous volunteer might not accomplish, the next bullet of the practised sharpshooter certainly would, and Clif, calculating chances, adopted a simple

ruse, and escaped, as he hoped and intended.

As he lay there feigning death, prone in full view, the sharpshooter, wherever he was, must have decided that his last bullet had gone home.

The traitorous miscreant nearer at hand must have thought this, too, or else he feared being ferretted out himself.

There was renewed rustling among the vines, and no further shooting.

Clif made no move. That death-trap, the mountain gap, had become a charnel house. If he hoped to escape the fate of his predecessors he must be wary, patient.

Finally the deepening shadows tempted him to risk coming back into action.

Clif had but one thought in his mind—to overtake the assassin of the volunteer soldier boy.

It was not a thirst for vengeance—it was the stern, solemn dictates of justice, of duty, that inspired him.

A thousand perils could not daunt him in the pursuit of this holy, earnest object.

Without attracting attention—judging from the lack of warning bullets from sharpshooter or lurker—Clif crept out of the range of the one up the leafy burrow that had encompassed the disappearance of the other.

It was not a difficult ascent, for a stout vine trunk served for a ladder, and crevices in the rock showed where his late assailant had comfortably rested, and then, as comfortably continued his route to the top of the gap.

Clif came out where his enemy must have come out, and peered all about him.

In which direction had the man gone? It was not entirely dark yet, and Clif tried to trace from bent grasses and pressed down weeds the course pursued by the fugitive.

For perhaps half an hour, and covering a full quarter of a mile in the direction these marks seemed to indicate the recent progress of a human being, Clif kept every sense on the keen alert for a discovery of the man he was determined to run to cover.

"He would scarcely go that way," at last soliloquized the disappointed naval

MERRY LEARNS WHAT CASSIE REALLY IS.

officer. "That sharpshooter must be somewhere hereabouts, and beyond, less than a mile, come the Spanish entrenchments. Is the fellow hand-in-glove with them? If so, and he has made for their camp, I am blocked for a spell."

Clif had come to where the hills ran steeper. He paused, resting undecided, against a tier of stone marking the higher level.

But—slam!

The whole side of Clif's face seemed suddenly crushed in.

A shadowy weapon, the butt end of a rifle, was swung down upon him.

Clif staggered, dizzily struggling as one powerful hand grasped one arm, as another twined into his hair like pincers of steel.

In great pain, he was wrenched up from his footing thus.

His hair seemed pulling out by the roots. He was dragged, lifted perhaps five feet, flung prostrate.

Clif's blurred senses tried to comprehend what had occurred, he sought to ascertain the menace hovering about him.

His head had struck the rock as he was flung down. Now it seemed as if a mountain of weight had landed on his chest.

Clif's soul sickened as he made out that a human knee pressed him there, and held him with one arm doubled up under him.

The other was instantly pinioned by a like furious grip.

Hot, hissing breath swept his face—vicious, venomous eyes burrowed malignantly, triumphantly down into the depths of his own.

"Charmed life, indeed!" voiced unmistakable accents.

Clif knew the tones—there was no guesswork as to the identity of his persistent foe.

With his free hand the renegade volunteer drew a broad knife from his belt.

Clif could not repress a shudder. Its awful blade dripped a curdling globule upon his upturned face.

It had drank the life blood of the brave soldier boy—the victim of the crime in the trenches.

Now it was about to find a sheath in a second true and loyal heart.

"Wait!" struggled Clif.

"Yes, I will wait!" coolly sneered the man who pinned him down. "Say a minute—no longer—and say your say, Faraday, if that's what you're up to!"

"I want to ask a question."

"I can fancy it!"

"You are——"

The scoundrel's face blackened, his eyes emitted a fiendish glare.

"You ask that?"

"I ask that."

"And never guess?"

"I know you!"

It came upon Clif Faraday with a certain sense of humiliation—an instantaneous, an intuitive divination of the identity of this man.

Amid the exciting hours of the late afternoon it had not occurred to him to connect this miscreant with his would-be assassin of the palisade, although the association was natural.

Now recognizing, or rather enlightened, the fellow's true status flashed across Clif's mind with searchlight intensity and suddenness.

"Yes," murmured Clif, with something of a shock, "I can place you now!"

"Ha! ha—you can?"

"You are David Parr!"

The miscreant showed his teeth as he ground them.

"You are one of the wolves of the navy!"

"They call us that, do they?" jibed the murderous scoundrel. "I'll show you. Wolves tear—I rip! Faraday, you spoiled our game about that two hundred thousand dollars, the paymaster's gold. You shot one of my comrades—you're getting the other ready for his death sentence. It's a big score, a deadly score, and I am going to wipe it off the slate!"

The fellow gave his ponderous arm a tragical swing.

"Here!"

He swooped the knife across the dizzied vision of his hopeless victim.

"Now!"

Close quarters had come—Clif Faraday felt that the moment was supreme in its dark, certain menace.

Battered, wounded, alone in that lonely spot with a human monster, he felt

BY ALL MEANS READ OUR PREMIUM OFFER—SEE LAST PAGE.

his menaced ending to be humiliatingly inglorious, to die thus at the hands of a hired assassin!

His own life was not so much—that he had cast into the balance for weal or for woe the day he had joined the American fleet.

Upon him, however, depended other lives—the welfare, the happiness of the persecuted. If he was blotted out, the wolves of the navy would succeed in at least a portion of their nefarious designs.

The doughty naval officer rallied, massed all the strength and courage of his hardy nature at one final desperate impulse.

Somehow he wrenched free his hand, or Parr, amazed and taken off guard by his unexpected resistance, released it, the better and surer to direct the final knife thrust.

Somehow, too, down on his sword hilt Clif's hand fell—out the glittering blade instantly swept from the sheath.

A vivid stroke cut the assassin's face—he sprang erect with a roar of frantic pain.

A frightful oath wreathed his lips.

Clif had got to his knees. He was guarding himself with the sword.

Upon the ground lay the rifle where Parr had thrown it.

This he seized suddenly. Righting it, as before he employed it as a club.

A swinging blow drove Clif's sword guard to nought, and swept across his cheek, striking him flat.

In an instant the scoundrel was again upon him.

Seizing him about the neck, he lifted him with a swirl.

Twice round and round he circled—twice round and round Clif felt the air whistle, cut and whiz.

Then David Parr let go of his prey.

And then, heartless monster as he was, amazed at the fearful outcome of his sudden transport of anger, the assassin and renegade stood staring with satisfaction at the frightful peril of his victim.

CHAPTER VII.

FACE TO FACE.

Clif had spun across the rocky surface, unable to stop himself.

"I AM THE WICKEDEST GIRL IN THE WORLD." SEE TIP TOP No. 135.

A loose stone fortunately tripped him. He stumbled and sat down flat.

The amazed, startled pose of Parr made him turn a swift glance back of him.

His senses thrilled as he made a discovery—he had landed not six inches from the edge of a yawning chasm.

He strove to struggle erect as he made a second—under his weight the fibrous soil that supported him was giving way.

Clif had somehow retained hold of his sword. Staggering to his feet, he saw the final chance of the hour—to plunge forward and force a last combat with the enemy who had so relentlessly pursued him.

Clif floundered. The earth was disintegrating like a quicksand.

Parr evidently feared that the sudden activity of his victim might eventuate in his slipping him in some way.

He raised the rifle and took aim anew.

"We'll wind this up!" he said, and stared afresh.

His shot had sped harmless for the reason that the living target in view when he pulled the trigger had disappeared entirely with the echo of the report.

Clif had gone with a slipping mass of the yielding dirt ledge.

He shot down with a gasp—he came to a halt with a shock.

It was swinging, yielding contact, but nerve-shattering as well for he must have dropped as far as thirty feet.

"A hammock!" he cried. "Why——"

In the most peculiar situation of his life, Clif sat still, staring at one of its most startling happenings.

He had landed in a hammock, large, roomy, staunch, strong, but it held another occupant.

It was swung between two trees near to their top, with nothingness yawning for a hundred feet below.

For a moment Clif could not understand what possible pleasure or business could have induced any person to swing so airy and dangerous a resting place.

Its inaccessibility, its remoteness, were puzzling points to construe, and then Clif guessed out the riddle with a start.

"Sit still," drawled a Spanish voice; "perfectly still! I have you!"

"Yes, he's got me!" muttered Clif, under his breath; "fast and sure! It's the sharpshooter!"

Clif let his sword hand and his free hand drop to a submissive pose by his side, for a Mauser rifle covered his heart.

He had fallen in one end of the hammock. Reposing tranquilly back in its other end a man with an eye like an eagle covered him with glance and aim.

Clif had fought some desperate battles in all kinds of queer places in his brief but eventful naval career, but had never been cornered in such a novel place as this before.

A glance round, below, showed him that he had invaded a most secret haunt of the Spanish skirmish forces.

This fellow, like some mountain lion entrenched in impregnable lair, had taken up a position commanding a perfect view of the cut and its vicinity for miles.

Sheltered by the immense tree leaves, supplied with smokeless powder cartridges, in his lofty couch he had probably passed many days and nights continuously.

In its centre was a heap of stuff, which Clif's quick eyes scanned to make out ammunition and food supplies that would last a week or over.

Here was the autocrat of the destinies of those who dared penetrate the cut—here the mysterious, invisible executioner of so many American soldiers!

The hammock after a violent jolt had swung to and fro slightly, but it now came to a dead halt.

An impressive silence brooded. The sharp, gleaming eye of the Spaniard met the clear, unflinching gaze of the somewhat astounded Clif.

The sharpshooter asked no questions as to how Clif had happened to topple in thus unceremoniously upon him—he evidently guessed all that out.

As to Clif's naval status, his costume told that.

"My friend," again spoke the sharpshooter, "I am sorry!"

There was a calm, easy drawl to his

tone that warned Clif that he was a fellow of tremendous nerve.

This, too, must be true, for a man who could isolate himself for purposes of wholesale butchery in this sombre eerie, was likely to prove a person of no ordinary mettle.

"Why are you sorry?" propounded Clif, bluntly.

"You are an American."

"As you see."

"You have blundered on my secret lair."

"That is true, but unconsciously. It saved my life, though——"

"Only to have you lose it!" promptly, incisively pronounced the Spaniard. "I say I am sorry. My business is shooting at far range. Hand to hand, swords would be more gentlemanly, but the requirements of war are imperative. Sit still! Reflect—prepare."

"For death?"

"It must be so."

Clif Faraday bowed his head.

This man was hard as iron, flinty-nerved as stone.

He never lowered his rifle, and Clif knew that all pleading or argument in the world would not move him.

The cadet sat saying not another word. The culminating adventure of the night had seemingly landed him in the last ditch.

"We will say five minutes," spoke the sharpshooter, evenly. "Then close your eyes and die like a man—as I should do had I fallen into your hands under similar circumstances."

Clif felt the succeeding two minutes of silence oppress him, close in on him, like some material pall.

Three minutes left! Clif glanced in mute despair at the levelled gun barrel, at the calm, cold eye behind it.

His fingers twitched nervously, but he dared not make a motion towards his pistol holster.

He gripped and ungripped his restless hand across the handle of his sword, strangely retained through all the manifold adventures of the night.

If four feet of steel did not obstruct a sturdy barrier between himself and his foe, despite the insecure footing the loose

meshes of the hammock afforded, he would have sprung at him with the hope of cutting him down.

This was not to be thought of, however—the rifle was both a shield and a menace.

That sword! It had seen Clif through many a desperate sortie. Must it lie idle at a critical moment when to die humble, mute, resigned, seemed almost cowardly?

"It's death anyway!" murmured Clif, recklessly. "If I have to go, he shall go with me!"

Clif Faraday had resolved to anticipate his doom.

Shuddering depths hovered below, he could not hope to escape with his life, but he might strike one sterling blow for liberty by removing this crack sharpshooter of the Spanish army.

Clif was considerable of an athlete, a gymnast as well.

He had a critical eye, an unerring nerve, a lithe, supple form.

The suggestion that now spurred up his energies was a desperate one, but he could not sit still supinely and be butchered.

He got just the right clutch on the handle of his sword—lying so innocent looking and harmless at his side.

He calculated just how he would poise, dodge, land, strike out.

"Stop!" shot out the Spanish sharpshooter's tones, a bullet whizzing past Clif's head which would have found its mark had not the swaying hammock prevented good aim.

But Clif had sprung erect.

He thought not of balance; his mind was centred on doing one thing quick as a flash.

He turned like a spinning top—his sword arm described a circle half a second only in duration.

All his strength was massed in the blow he aimed.

The sword landed against the mesh of ropes sustaining the hammock.

Like filmy cobwebs they snapped.

One grab, and Clif took a swing through space with the freed, whirling hammock.

A yell split the air.

A hand, a foot of the astounded, un-

prepared sharpshooter, hurtling through space, dealt Clif's dangling form a violent blow.

Then, swaying, Clif gazed down.

A black human arrow was piercing space.

The thud of a skull landing on a rock deep down in the shadowy cut, rang out like a snapping percussion cap.

The Spanish sharpshooter had met his match, and had gone to his long, last account!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPANISH GENERAL.

Clif Faraday hung suspended between heaven and earth well-nigh overcome with the horror and peril of his position.

A climb up the tangled meshes of the hammock, a clutch on the tree that now solely supported it, and he managed at last to gain a secure foothold on a narrow ledge.

Clif could comprehend, after an hour of cautious, painful progress, how the sharpshooter had gained the precarious spot.

Thoroughly exhausted through climbings, falls, the scaling of seeming impossible spurs of rock, in one place a squeezing progress through a cave tunnel past dangerous pitfalls, Clif came to a rest on the gap ledge proper.

"It has been enough to turn a person's hair gray," he soliloquized, "the adventures of this eventful night!"

But it was all past now. A gruesome, chronicle of death lay back in the gloomy cut, five precious lives had been blotted out, still that had been accomplished which affected the welfare of many thousands—the joining of the broken telegraph wires.

Clif grimly tried to forget the pitiful and tragic aspects of the desperate exploit that seemed to end with the drop to his doom of the Spanish sharpshooter.

For Parr was gone. As soon as he was fairly himself again, quick to rejuvenate, Clif made a thorough, and persistent search for the renegade—assassin.

One of two conjectures only could suggest the possible destination of the renegade.

THE BOX OFFICE RECEIPTS ARE ATTACHED.

He might have gone to the Spanish camp—it was not unlikely that the treacherous scoundrel was in touch with the dons—he might have proceeded to Mana to join Bruce.

Clif did not feel called on to venture to the former place. The cut was now clear, but beyond its other end the Spaniards were still entrenched, and the naval officer felt that he could gain no material point by again running the gauntlet.

"It is Mana," he decided, "fast and straight! I feel that I have a solemn duty to perform, the delivery to justice of the murderer of that poor soldier boy, but the woes of the living as well call for attention. To find Bruce, the missing marine, the kidnaped girl, Edna Danvers, is to find Parr eventually, for even if he has not gone at once to Mana, his plots are closely concerned with the doings of those three, and eventually, I shall have him!"

Besides this, Vic must be at Mana, with possible important information to impart, and Clif turned his steps westward, calculating how speedily he could manage to cover the twenty miles between himself and his proposed point of destination.

The condition of the district he knew to be uncertain and unsafe for a casual stroller in uniform.

The Americans occupied several towns and many strategical points outside of them, but here and there the Spaniards were massed, and the shifting tactics of various annoying guerilla hordes made vigilance and caution extremely necessary.

"It is no man's land for four miles ahead," ruminated Clif. "Then I can diverge to the camp at Las Dervia, if I choose, secure a horse, and put on faster. There is a light!"

Clif, pursuing a furtive, guarded course, came upon the gleams of the same emanating from what seemed to be an isolated hut in a kind of a hollow.

So many former residents in this particular section had been scared out or routed out since the closing in on Santiago had begun, that the circumstances made him somewhat furious.

The light was set prominently, too—a

lantern in a window—and scouting duty seemed to call for at least a cursory investigation of the circumstance.

Clif edged towards the hut in a round-about way. He could make no one out inside the place, although both door and window were open.

"I won't meddle here any further," he decided preparatory to making a detour, but halted again behind a big tree stump.

The sound of voices reached the ears of the lurker. Then dimly he made out two forms flitting in the shadows at the side of the house.

Clif strained his hearing to catch some intelligent word. It came—with a shock.

"I have waited over an hour—how much longer?"

Perfectly familiar—from recent close contact—with the tones, Clif Faraday recognized the speaker instantly.

A kind of wondering, extravagant joy possessed him. In the widest range of possibility he could scarcely have hoped that luck, fate, would so soon place him again so near to the man who was now the practical centre of all his interest and plans.

It was Parr—the accents were unmistakable. As his restless promenade took him momentarily across the bars of light emanating from the window, face and form were distinctly outlined.

With him was a low-browed, hunch-shouldered specimen of the lowest type of Spaniard.

"He will be here," this individual was saying eagerly—"you will have no fear. The hour appointed is not yet past. It is important. The general must see you. It is coin, favor, to your score. All is arranged.

The general! Clif Faraday pricked up his ears. Parr was training in high company, it seemed. What new plot of this ravenous wolf was he destined to run across?

He had the man at his mercy now—two crippling shots, a brisk assault, and Clif was not afraid but that he could handle both these fellows.

The words of the Spaniard, however, had aroused him. Some one else was coming—"the general."

A sinister proceeding Clif noted it, the

Do You Want To Know About Theatrical Life? Read the Tip Top.

appearance at this lonely spot of a high Spanish official—at this hour of the night, for the purpose of meeting this unsavory villain.

It could only involve some vast military exigency, and Clif, feeling that he edged upon some episode of new rare importance, curbed the promptings of impulse, and determined to wait, listen, and act only in the capture of Parr when he more fully comprehended the entire situation.

The two men moved away a little distance as if in the hopes of meeting the expected visitor.

Then Clif fancied he detected a quick hail. With no little eagerness he watched the return of the party, now, judging from voices, he heard, augmented to three.

All that Clif saw as the trio advanced, of its new accession, was a tall, stately man closely cloaked, evidently feeling himself out of place and anxious to shield his identity, as if he was up to some undignified or criminal proceeding.

The three entered the house. The lantern was taken from the window and set on a table in the room beyond.

Up to that window Clif now stole, determined to be as near as possible to the actors in what he judged might turn out to be decidedly interesting conversation.

It was so, in fact. The very first words of the general, low but distinct, satisfied the naval scout that he had done well to linger and watch.

"Let us be brief," the Spanish officer was saying. "I agree to your proposition."

"And your part of it?"

"Open the way, and leave that to us. You are sure of your ground?"

"What! with every nook and corner of the American camp free to my view for over three days?"

"That is true. It is to-morrow evening?"

"At midnight."

"You are to act on the minute?"

"It is the one the most propitious. Were ever affairs better arranged to strike a fatal blow? The money, general, or its assurance, and I practically deliver into

your hands the greatest Spanish victory of the war!"

"You have all arranged?"

"Ask Vizel here!"

"Then——"

The conversation dropped to a low hum. In vain Clif Faraday strained his hearing.

What was the consummation of some diabolical plot against the American camp, was evidently scored amid whispered consultation, the rustling of papers—bank notes or their equivalent.

Then followed the shuffling of feet.

"At midnight I act!" Clif heard Parr once more proclaim.

"At midnight we move, then. The rocket signal from Vizel, you have the same, my man?"

"As furnished. It shall fly to warn you the minute our friend here gives the word."

"Then all is settled. It is a fearful alternative, but Spain's last gasp, and when all is over and done, who will know?"

"Who, indeed!" jeered David Parr, with a malevolent chuckle.

CHAPTER IX.

IN CLOSE COMPANY.

There was a movement towards the door of the hut, and Clif Faraday glided back to the shelter and shadow of the tree stump.

Some lively ideas ran riot in the active brain of the naval officer.

The tempting opportunity of capturing a real Spanish general was presented to the venturesome scout of the navy.

For a second Clif seriously entertained the thought of following the Spaniard.

As, however, he, Parr, and the fellow they had designated as Vizel, passed through the doorway and away from the house, a whistle satisfied Clif that the Spanish general was signalling an escort, not having come unattended.

He saw Parr and Vizel halt, turn and retrace their steps towards the hut.

"Get ready!" was what the renegade said as he entered the house.

He had seated himself, and judging from his companion's avaricious face

which was in Clif's range of vision, was counting the bills just given to him.

"You go—secretly?" inquired Vizel.

"Was there ever more need? I take no risks, undisguised!" retorted Parr. "The wiping out of that Faraday makes me feel secure, but he has his friends—also on the trail, I am assured. There is a fellow named Rollins——"

"You said he was at Mana?"

"He is at Mana, and, I fear, searching for Bruce, for the girl. He must be found——"

"And squelched!"

"You have it. Meantime, as I say, I can run no risks. I am missing—my move in the trenches may have been observed by the other volunteers. I know not, for I departed quickly after driving Faraday into ambush. A hunt for me may be started—my description sent out."

"I understand."

"So——"

"The old way?"

"Hidden, secure, till I get to Mana."

"And there?"

"A disguise, the settling up of this Bruce matter, the grand act at midnight to-morrow, and if money can buy the liberty of my friend held prisoner as a traitor by the fleet, I have it to spend."

"Well-planned—I go to prepare."

Clif weighed and considered every word that was spoken.

His duty was eminently plain—to land this man a prisoner in official hands, with details furnished of his acts and intentions before that "grand act at midnight" was due.

It was in his power probably by the exercise of a little shrewd management to down both of these villains ere they left for new fields of enterprise.

To do this, however, Clif fully realized, would be to lose the chance of learning where the missing marine, Reeves Harlow and his affianced bride, Edna Danvers, were held prisoners.

If he could keep these plotters in sight till they reached Mana, till, as he intimated, Parr joined his employer and confederate, Bruce, he would be enabled to bag the entire outfit.

This line of action Clif fully decided

upon.. He stole after Vizel as the latter came out of the house and proceeded to a broken-down shed running some distance behind the cabin.

Clif's surmises were somewhat obscure as to what Parr meant when he alluded to a "secret" departure.

Soon, however, the naval officer was in full possession of the intentions of the renegade.

Lighting a second lantern and going into the shed—as seen by Clif peering through the cracks at its side—Vizel approached a large heavy mule.

He released its halter and proceeded to strap on a strong chain-seamed girth supplied with two great hooks.

Two tubular baskets, tightly woven, such as he had seen in common use in the farming districts about Guayla, Vizel now lifted and attached to the hooks.

Both had covers, and one of these he proceeded to throw back.

In a corner of the shed were some large lumps of dry clay.

These, till he had weighted the basket fully a hundred pounds, Vizel threw in.

Over the mass he thrust some coarse bagging, shut the cover down, hustled about till he had secured a long leading strap and a whip, and then said audibly as he passed out of the shed:

"All is ready!"

Clif Faraday watched him return to the hut. Clif had studied his every maneuver, had reflected, had decided.

Now he acted.

It was not difficult to guess what the muleteer was up to.

In the guise of a presumable native carrier, all roads were open to him.

The Spaniards were his friends, he was safe if he met them. The American soldiers would not interfere with a person of his humble apparently honest pretensions.

The scheme was to get Parr to Mana, past all interference or challenging obstacles, without being seen.

"I understand," soliloquized Clif hurrying into the shed. "It's a chance for a free ride—and why not?"

Clif proceeded briskly to undo the work just perfected by Vizel.

He removed the lumps of clay, throw-

WHAT A TWO CENT STAMP WILL DO—SEE LAST PAGE.

ing them through a break in the floor in a dark corner of the place where they would not be likely to be seen.

Clif was in the pannier, the bagging over him, the cover shut, inside of three minutes time.

Before two more had passed footsteps and voices approached.

"Disappear, my friend!" chuckled Vizel.

Clif through the chinks of his basket saw Parr clamber up and over into the corresponding one.

"Wake me up when we reach Mana," he observed, half in earnest.

"You may readily repose," insisted Vizel. "I have weighted the other basket, so the jolting will not be so troublesome. Forward! We are started."

Clif congratulated himself on the rare good fortune and promise of his new environment.

There was not the least doubt but that he would be undisturbed until they reached Mana.

To reach Mana, presumably meant to arrive directly at some secret hiding-place of the plotter, Parr, and his fellow plotter, including Bruce.

Clif settled down in the roomy basket, resigned to a long and arduous ride.

It proved to be neither, however. The mule plodded steadily, and inside of four hours, without halt or hindrance, arrived at its destination.

Clif heard the muleteer knock on the basket concealing the renegade.

"We are at our journey's end," he announced.

There was a direction in reply, and the animal turned from the street it was in and under a stone archway.

As it proceeded thence into a yard and through a gate into a shed, Clif could only dimly make out their surroundings.

He felt the basket he was in sag and drop a few inches as Parr evidently got out of the other one.

Then came a tumble as Vizel released the girth, letting it and its load drop unheeded to the floor.

He led the mule away. Clif had nearly spilled out, the cover flapping back so he could see perfectly.

At One Time Everybody Is Discouraged in No. 135 of Tip Top.

He crawled out entirely as he was satisfied that both men had left the shed.

Just before reaching its door he heard a door locked, slammed—which one of several in the rear of a dark building before him he could not tell.

"Housed, and I know their burrow!" murmured Clif, surveying the structure critically.

For some time he lingered, studying it, hoping to see some light or hear some directing noise.

All was dark and silent, however, and Clif, stealing across the yard, gained the gate, then the arch, and finally the street.

A front view of the place indicated that it was some kind of an abandoned business house, for its steps were gone, several of its windows boarded across.

Nearly opposite, a high church structure cast a dense shadow against the half-risen moon.

Clif crossed over. This edifice, too, looked considerably the worse for wear, and then he began to discern that during a fight between the Spaniards and Americans near the village a week previous, the artillery had played particular havoc in this particular street.

Clif stumbled over a broken walk, glided up the broken steps of the church, and, seating himself, fixed his eye again on the building opposite.

A rustle made him look around.

The sound of quick breathing brought him to his feet, hand on pistol, in a flash.

A form was advancing, and Clif backed slowly with a brief challenge:

"Who is this?"

He spoke in Spanish, but the reply came in cheery, conventional English, in tones of eager welcome.

"I know that voice; if it isn't Clif Faraday!"

CHAPTER X.

THE MASCOT OF THE UNCAS.

Clif Faraday instantly thought of Vic Rollins, but the tones were not those of his chum and fellow cadet.

"Don't you know?" piped the shadowy intruder, coming nearer.

"Oh! Little Tom Warrington!"

"Of the Uncas. That's who! You remember I started away with Rollins?"

"I remember," interrupted Clif, quickly, "but where is he?"

"Up there."

"Up where?"

"I'm pointing."

"But I can't see you point!"

"Overhead. Rollins is up in the top rigging of this old building of this old hulk."

"What doing?"

"Looking for the mascot of the Uncas."

Clif gave an intelligent start. That was enough for him—the brief information accorded. He could guess out the rest.

The talkative gunner's mate still rattling on, Clif groped his way farther into the dark vestibule, stumbled against some stairs, and uttered a low, peculiar whistle.

Plainly as if words were spoken, the return call expressed a surprised note of intense welcome.

"I'll find my way!" vouchsafed Clif, and started up the stairs.

They wound about spirally, ending at a platform.

"Stop, there!" called a prompt voice, as Clif's foot moved a loose board.

"This is something of a surprise, Vic!"

"You're happening in on us?"

"No."

"Yes—how did you come to locate us?"

"Accident. Why! the platform shakes as if it would drop down any minute!"

"It will, if you are not cautious. Get my hand. Step with care. Here you are—at the base of the steeple! Now then, let's hear what brought you?"

It was a queer place for a colloquy but Clif detailed his remarkable story.

"So, get down with me promptly!" he directed. "We have work to do, you see?"

"There is some up here, first."

"You mean the mascot?"

"I mean the white crowned eagle. Tom Warrington has my faithful pledge to recapture it."

"But explain how it got here?"

"We traced it ashore. Twenty persons had seen it, and a man had caught it, a

Cuban. We ran him down about five miles from here. Mana was nearer than the camp. Tom insisted on keeping company with me. I got a trace of your man——"

"Bruce?"

"In the house where you have run Parr to cover—the one opposite here. I could not get word to you as agreed, as the telegraph line was not working. We posted ourselves here on watch."

"And the eagle?"

"Got out of the box where Tom Warrington had cooped it, and somewhere up in the steeple here. That was an hour since. Hear it fluttering up there?"

Clif was impatiently anxious to get through with the trivial side issue intruding on what he considered the all-important affair of the hour.

"If there is a chance to get the eagle, let us do so," he said, "and have done with it!"

"It's only a question of climbing."

"Then put at it, get Warrington the bird, send him away with it, and let you and I proceed to investigate that house yonder."

"Together?"

"It may prove a task for two up in that narrow dark chimney of a hole, if Old Terror has got his fighting blood up."

"Move carefully, then, Clif! The cannon balls struck the old church in a dozen spots—the base of the steeple got it worst. Its propped up now with timbers from the roof."

"Why?"

"I don't fancy a little episode that occurred down below there just before I came up."

"What was that?"

"Tom and I had been conversing quite freely, never imagining an auditor. A sneeze made us start, I can tell you! and up slouched a man, and out."

"Who was he?"

"Some Spanish tramp who don't understand English, I fervently hope! He didn't appear to notice us, and he staggered as if he had just been sleeping off a debauch, but that may have all been put on."

"For what purpose?"

"To get away and afford him an opportunity to warn the people what we were talking about."

"Oh! I don't think that."

"You can never tell, with these tracherous dons. They sell a decent friend for a drink, and as to an American—the place is Spanish enough yet to make them wicked and ugly."

"Up, Vic!"

"Up, it is!"

Clif groped about and guessed his bearings—it would be a straight climb among a bewildering maze of braces and rafters.

He could hear the eagle fluttering far aloft, probably at the extreme top of the steeple.

"What have you got to hold it with, if we succeed in getting to it?" inquired Clif.

"It's got quite a bit of rope dangling from one foot."

"I fancy we can manage then."

Clif Faraday's masterly energies were put in full requisition to accomplish the purpose lying at hand, but his thoughts were all on the gloomy building opposite and its mysterious inmates.

It was something to recapture the mascot of the Uncas, but this sentimental exploit lost force in considering that not for an unnecessary moment must sight be lost of that hoodoo of the navy—the traitor, David Parr.

Clif took the initiative. Vic followed his climbing lead.

The old steeple shook warningly the higher they went.

The first of a series of narrow windows in its length reached, Clif halted at an ominous creak.

"You needn't come up any higher," he said to Vic.

"It does seem unsafe."

"Even for one. Remain here."

"You'll tackle Old Terror alone?"

"I think I had better. What was that?"

It sounded like a shout following a repressed whistle, but the echoes were vague and misleading in that confined, hollow void.

"Some street cry, probably."

"Not Warrington?"

"I told him to fire—gave him my revolver—if there was occasion for alarm," explained Vic.

Clif resumed the ascent.

He started to peer from the window, but the clouds of dust and cobwebs kept him busy till there was a flutter, a shrill screech, and then Clif's clear, definite call.

"I have him!"

"Capital!" voiced Vic, in relief and satisfaction. "That will placate Warrington—he deserves the reward for sticking to me so patiently. Clif!"

"Vic!"

The double call was a blended aspiration of significant alarm.

A warning, a signal, had rang out unmistakably in the neighborhood of the street—

A pistol shot.

"Warrington!" cried Vic.

"Some one fired!" added Clif hastily. "Get down quick as you can, Vic! I'm hampered and can't go fast."

"You've got to! Mercy! Clif Faraday, we're in an awful fix!"

"What's that!" called Clif, fully startled at the emphatic declaration.

Vic Rollins had glanced from the window—the roof thirty feet below met his view.

A sight that met his gaze caused that vivid ejaculation.

The man who had passed himself and Tom Warrington in the church vestibule on a drunken slouch an hour previous, was in full sight.

With him was a second sinister-looking fellow.

They were bustling about two braces, that, propped against small blocks, practically kept the recently bombarded steeple from crashing out of place.

One had a rope, strong and long.

He gave it a loop about the braces, and flung its other end uncoiling over the side of the structure, so that it must have trailed with ample slack into the street below.

Vic Rollins was not so quick a thinker as his comrade, Clif, but he could not fail to read the situation aright.

The second of the two fellows on the roof very much resembled a person he

had seen enter the house under surveillance over the way, just after locating it as Bruce's lair.

The man who had feigned to be drunk had, indeed, understood English.

He had gathered up enough of Vic's desultory talk with Tom Warrington to guess what these two were after.

Possibly a member of the strong crowd of mercenaries Bruce and Parr controlled, he had reported to one of his two employers the facts of the overheard conversation.

He must have been set on watch—understood the ascent for the mascot.

Little Tom Warrington had fired the alarm signal—he must have been overpowered afterwards:

These two had hurried to the roof. They had calculated the predicament of the two in the steeple to a nicety.

Before they could descend even as far as the roof, one pull of the stout cable would bring down the unstable steeple a mass of ruins, crushing, annihilating two more hated Yankee pigs!"

Vic was in a transport of suspense and alarm as he traced all this out.

He shouted up to Clif such an explanation as half a dozen frantic words could give.

Then he started to descend, almost recklessly.

He must reach the roof before those two men gained the street, or all was lost!

Clif was in a far worse predicament than his comrade in peril.

He was higher up, and there the braces narrowed so that a slow process of squeezing through was absolutely necessary for several feet down.

He ran the rope attached to the eagle's foot through his belt, and heedless of crushing it, tried to hurry his descent.

A gap where some shingles were gone he enlarged with one blow of his fist.

The two men Vic had described were just running to leave the roof.

Clif fired down at them nearly to his last shot—they were out of range unhurt before he could make his labored aim effective.

Clif hurried his descent anew.

He counted the minutes—his heart throbs kept time with the reckless clatter Vic made far below.

Suddenly a brace gave way in his hand.

The eagle shrieked as it was crushed and grazed. Clif fell several feet ere he caught himself.

He might yet gain the roof level at least in time to leave the steeple ere it toppled.

"Cliff!" rang up a poignant scream of alarm.

There was a creak, a tearing jar.

Clif Faraday felt himself sway with a sickening kind of a jolt.

The steeple was going over.

Crash! the next instant it landed on the roof, broke through, and the structure was a mass of ruins.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VILLAIN BAFFLED.

"Halt!"

The call was low-toned, but unmistakably martial.

Tramping feet that had disturbed Clif Faraday came to a sudden stop—disturbed? They had aroused him from a sudden trance of more than twenty-four hours.

It was night for there was a light at his elbow—another night, for a clock on a shelf of the room he occupied indicated the hour of eight.

Clif struggled upright on a couch and his hand went up to his head.

A bandage surrounded it. Then the crash and destruction of the falling church steeple recurred to him.

What had happened, and how had he come here? What was the meaning of the martial tramp outside in the corridor? Was he a prisoner, and the invisible intruders his gaolers or executioners?

The door opened. A single person had entered the room.

"Tom!" murmured Clif half bewilderedly—"Tom Warrington!"

"Hey!" warned up the gunner's mate of the Uncas, all agrin with pleasure—"two of you all right!"

"Two?" repeated Clif, vaguely.

"See him?" cried Warrington, removing a cloth from a parrot cage in a corner, and showing the mascot of the Uncas wedged in pretty tightly, but grim and

LOOK OUT FOR THAT TREACHEROUS TRICK.

dignified as ever. "You stuck to him! Old 'Terror has a broken claw, one eye knocked out, but he'll pull through, and you, Faraday! I gave you up when I couldn't arouse you two hours since."

"Vic?" propounded Clif.

"Working while you rest."

"What's that?"

"I don't know, but he said there was those people to watch."

"I understand," nodded Clif. "Now then, Tom, tell me what happened at the old church."

"Vic dodged destruction, you went down in the crash. I got away from a burly Spaniard who knocked me into the fuel vault of the old hulk. It took us hours, but we finally burrowed you out."

"Hurt?"

"Don't you feel it?"

Clif did, in bruises, in a certain swaying confusion of the mind, but he got up quite steadily.

"If you'll brace yourself on some of that truck, I'll tell you the rest," promised the gunner's mate, pointing to a stand containing some cordial and biscuits. "We brought you here and provided that, for the one apology for a doctor we could find in call said you had no broken bones, only a broken head, and your appetite would be more alarming than your pain when you came to!"

Clif mechanically drained a glass and crumbled up a biscuit, but his eyes were anxious and unsatisfied.

"Where is this place?" he asked.

"Near the church."

"And that other house?"

"The one we were watching?"

"Yes."

"Vic is attending to that."

"Then it's all right!" hoped Clif, with a half-satisfied sigh. "Is some one with you?" he abruptly demanded, as there was a rustling in the hall outside.

"There is," confessed Tom Warrington.

"Who?"

"A file of soldiers. As I told you, when you did not wake up at dusk as Vic insisted and the doctor prophesied, I felt that I was taking a deal of responsibility in letting matters run on careless like. There's a camp three miles away. I told

a captain the circumstance—your name was enough. The soldiers were sent. They've got a letter——"

"No letter for me!" declared Clif, with arousing spirit, "but—I'll utilize their services just the same if there is no objection."

"You'll find them accommodating," pledged Warrington.

The promise was not a wild one. Clif's mind roused up as his nerves and wits got fully untangled from the prize tumble of his active career.

What Vic was about he did not know, but while he realized that his indomitable fellow cadet had certainly made straight for matters pertaining to David Parr, the missing marine, and his stolen betrothed, he felt that it was a complicated affair for one person to handle, and promptly worked out an immediate course of action for himself.

He had the soldiers in the room just long enough to explain that the interests of the service demanded an official visit to a certain house near by.

Clif led the way to the place he knew had housed the renegade and his associate the night previous.

It held them no longer, however. As he approached the place, he observed only a veiled woman haunting its rear yard, who furtively vanished as she saw the intruders, and a man seated in the open rear doorway, smoking indolently.

The fellow was pert, insolent, indifferent, and Clif could not recognize him as any adherent of the renegade he had seen before.

The man willingly led him through the house—it held no other occupant.

"I am looking for a so-called American named Parr," said Clif, "as you well know, for a second miscreant named Vizel, and one Bruce."

"You will find them all gone—hours since—save the one you name, Bruce. It is for him I am keeping the house open," admitted the Spaniard.

"What! he is coming back?" exclaimed Clif.

"Surely! And why not?"

Even as the man spoke, braggart, and with a certain undertone of defiance, Clif Faraday sprang half way across the room.

THERE ARE SYMPTOMS OF MADNESS IN No. 135 OF TIP TOP.

Two persons had entered it from the outside.

"Miss Danvers!" exclaimed Clif.

It was the beautiful American girl, but so changed that half Clif's startled surprise was due to the alteration in her appearance.

Her face was colorless, her eyes stricken, her whole mien suggestive of a person under some crushing spell of dread and woe.

She recognized Clif with a start. One pleading expression illumined her face. Then it died down to utter hopelessness.

"You will pardon me," spoke a brusque, intruding voice, and her companion, a man, stepped between them. "Mrs. Arindell Bruce is the lady's name."

"What!" cried Clif, aghast.

"This lady is my wife—we have this moment been married at the register's."

"Is this true? Are you married to this—man?"

"It—it is true," she voiced, faintly.

"Incredible!"

"I am satisfied."

"What is that!" cried Clif, arousing like a lion. "Miss Danvers, is it possible that, terrorized by this villain, you have been induced to forget the friends who have unselfishly risked their lives to secure your welfare?"

"Spare me! spare me!" sobbed the wretched, heartbroken creature, her eyes raining tears. "It was to save Reeves Harlow from death!"

"You scoundrel!" raved Clif, mad to hurl himself at the throat of the villain.

"She says she is satisfied. She is my wife. You will oblige me by leaving this house at once!" uttered the unblushing knave with an attempt at dignity.

"And what of me?"

"Great Heavens!"

"Bigamist! scoundrel! thief!" continued the same ringing feminine voice; "what of me?"

The veiled form Clif had noticed in the yard filled the doorway suddenly.

Throwing aside a veil, a once fair but now careworn face was revealed.

As if shriveled by its glance, Bruce went hurtling back to the wall, aghast.

"My—my——"

"Your rightful wife!" pronounced the woman. "You fancied me shut up in the asylum where you placed me—poisoned, at your order—dead. You thought miles of land or sea could hinder the wronged, deserted woman who snatches from your lips the cup of triumph. Madam," to the quaking Miss Danvers, "you are not this man's wife—you are free, and he——"

"A military prisoner!" broke in Clif, sternly. "Men, secure him! This man must answer to the United States navy for assisting in the plots of its enemies and conniving at the murder of its representatives on duty."

"But my—my—Reeves Harlow?" gasped the agitated girl. "He promised he should be set free, that I should see him."

"Find him!" hissed the baffled schemer, blaring forth the venom of a knave driven to the last ditch. "I am downed, am I—perhaps! Edna Danvers, find your doomed lover, if you can!"

"I shall find him!" pronounced Clif Faraday, sturdily. "Men, that fellow to the prison, this young lady under safe guard till I report at your camp to-morrow. Once more, Miss Danvers, trust in the ability of the United States to protect its charges at all times!"

"Forgive—oh, forgive my mad terror, my foolish fear! This man——"

"I understand," nodded Clif; "but his power is gone. The fellow is fainting. See that he does not escape!"

"Say! you talk and act like a general!" declared the enthusiastically admiring Tom Warrington, as the apartment was cleared and they found themselves alone. "Now then what next?"

"We must find Vic Rollins!" proclaimed Clif, definitely. "I cannot help but fancy he has got some clue to the missing marine——"

"Reeves Harlow?"

"Yes, and is following it up."

"We'll start a chase, shall we?"

"It is vitally important, and——"

Clif Faraday stopped abruptly—so abruptly that the astonished gunner's mate looked askance.

His face actually paled, till the gunner's mate who had never seen Faraday

of the Uncas "flinch" before, looked frightened.

"What is it?" he breathed, excitedly.

"Listen!"

A clock was striking:

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine!"

"Why," began Warrington, puzzled at the extraordinary emotion manifested by his companion, "is it the time, the hour, that is distressing you, Faraday?"

"Yes!" replied the junior officer of the Uncas, "for it is only three hours to midnight!"

CHAPTER XII.

CLIF FARADAY'S LAST CARTRIDGE.

Clif Faraday had for a while "forgotten!"

Hardened to adventure and mishap though he might be, the exciting episodes of the hour, coupled with the effects of his terrible fall, had caused him to temporarily lose sight of a most important section of the affair in hand.

At that remindful stroke of the clock, Clif remembered!

Parr had left Mana because he was due at Guayla.

Clif's soul sprang to its old vivid alarm as he recalled the renegade's conversation with the Spanish general in the lonely mountain hut.

At midnight, this wholesale murderer, this conscienceless traitor, was to perform that which would give to the Spanish "the greatest triumph of the war."

Vic Rollins might be in danger, the life of the missing marine still menaced, but Clif saw in a flash where his duty lay.

The gunner's mate discerned that some tremendous emotion was swaying his hero and model.

"Faraday," he ventured, "something is wrong!"

"No!" disputed Clif, "everything is right—if you can help me out!"

"How?"

"Find Vic Rollins."

"I can try."

"A trace of the missing marine——"

"I can try that, too!"

"I am due at Guayla."

"You look fretted enough to fly there!"

SOMEBODY WARNS THE ENEMY. BUT WHAT DOES FRANK DO?

"I heartily wish I could."

Clif lost no time in getting out of the place.

It was simply a question of the fastest horse he could find, and within ten minutes Clif was provided.

A cavalryman chanced to be in town with his major's steed, and Clif's persuasive appeal to his patriotism, Clif's name adding to the force of the request, won the impressible soldier from all red-tape restrictions.

It was two hours later when the flashing steed bore its expert rider within sight of the lights of the camp at Guayla.

It was half an hour later when Clif summoned an adjutant to the entrance of the general's headquarters.

"Not here."

Clif was disappointed at the unexpected reply.

He mentioned several other officers down the graded list.

"All gone. There is the regular weekly consultation on military affairs at the town hall. I doubt if you will find an officer over corporal in the entire camp," vouchsafed the adjutant.

"I understand," murmured Clif, but with a start.

What the man said was true—once a week a meeting, in conjunction with Cuban civic representatives and messengers, from the navy, to exchange views and report the condition of affairs, was held as described.

Clif's pulses quickened as a dread suggestion came to his mind—these meetings usually lasted till after midnight. Could Parr's plot meditate some move against this grouped assembly of prominent officials?

Clif made for the town proper. It was just five minutes of twelve when he reached the vicinity of the building, the brilliantly lighted windows of which showed that the session was still in force.

About a square distant he dismounted and secured his horse to a stake.

The street had been torn up for drainage purposes, and he chose to pick his way on foot.

Clif's plan was to hasten instantly to the commander-general and communicate his information and suspicions.

He was hurrying forward fast as he could go when he halted with a shock.

"I thought it, and it is so!" he fairly gasped.

Two men had just reached a low building directly behind the town hall and communicating with it.

Once, Clif knew, it had been used as the town prison, but later abandoned.

Those two men Clif recognized in a flash.

One paused at the door of the place, unlocked it, waved his hand to his companion, and disappeared.

It was David Parr.

The other, bearing something wrapped up like a whip or fish pole in sacking, went around the other side of the building and was likewise lost to view.

In a flash Clif surmised the truth. The proximity of these two men to the meeting place of the directing official force of the American army could mean only danger!

He could not follow both men. Parr was the leader. His disappearance within the old building was most ominous.

Clif reached the door just closed. Fortunately he found it was half an inch ajar, but as he entered it clicked shut after him.

His glance was fixed ahead some forty feet, where a hallway ran the side of the structure.

Parr had drawn a lantern from under his coat.

He held it back of him as he approached a grated window.

"All right!" he sang out.

Then he started forward, almost on a run, and disappeared past another door.

Clif hurried to the window. He knew for whom the signal was intended, and peered out.

"The rocket—the signal to the Spanish army!" exclaimed the naval officer.

There was Viel, not thirty feet away, propping up against a pile of lumber the rocket he had just removed from its coverings.

Clif hesitated which was the more important of the two hovering dilemmas.

That rocket sent aloft might be the signal that all was ready for some sanguinary onslaught

It must not go up—Clif Faraday resolved that, at all hazards.

"One!"

The utterance came in a kind of a hissing fervor—his revolver held a single last cartridge.

Clif could only take oblique aim. It was hurried.

Snap—flare! went a match in Viel's hand.

Clif's own trembled. If he missed!

A report, a cry! The shot had gone true! The miscreant pitched forward, dragging the rocket with him, breaking its supporting stick into a dozen fragments.

The next instant Clif was past the doorway through which he had just seen Parr disappear.

"Halt!"

Clif bore an empty revolver now, but he leveled it coolly.

The renegade had in one hand a trailing fuse, lighted, running to a heavy percussion cap.

Clif comprehended that he had been startled by the pistol shot, and was hastening back to trace its source.

He stood aghast as he recognized the intruder.

"You—you!" he stammered, madly. "Fiends!"

The neglected fuse had exploded, the cap tearing the flesh of his hand painfully, and Parr sprang back to stumble.

Clif tried to reach him, for he saw that he had fallen over into some kind of a cavity.

A groan rang from its hollow depths.

A faint thud from way, way down told that the wretch must have descended fully a hundred feet, probably into one of the old water wells of the town, long since abandoned.

Clif picked up the lantern and ran ahead.

Directly under the council building stood an infernal machine with a time fuse.

That once ignited, building and inmates would have been blown to a thousand atoms!

Clif hurried back to the entrance of the place, with some difficulty forced the door, and passing the prostrate and in-

THE PENALTY WAS PAID.

sensible Vigel, unceremoniously burst into the council chamber.

There was a vast commotion, for the scheme of the plotters was soon comprehended.

Deprived of their leaders by the fearful explosion, the Spaniards had counted on demoralizing the American forces completely.

The camp was immediately aroused. A large detachment of the dons was discovered in a ravine back of the city, waiting for the rocket signal, surprised, surrounded, captured.

Vizel, a crippled wreck, was sent to the hospital.

The traitor Parr was brought up from the old well, dead. His neck had been broken by the fall.

Clif was more delighted than surprised when the next morning Vic Rollins and

Little Tom Warrington turned up, smiling and exultant.

Clif's fellow cadet had run down the missing marine to his place of imprisonment, overcame two guards who had orders to dispatch him on the morrow and with his happy betrothed, Reeves Harlow sent his expressions of undying gratitude to Clif.

Four hearty cheers roused the echoes as the quartette of adventurers returned to the gunboat, for all aboard knew of the naval officer's last meritorious exploit.

One was for the plucky gunner's mate, one for dauntless Vic Rollins—a rouser for Clif Faraday, and “a tiger and three” for the recovered Mascot of the Uncas!

[THE END.]

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